

## ANTIDOTE FOR MELANCHOLY

"Ah, friend K——, good morning to you; I am really happy to see you looking so cheerful. Pray, to what unusual circumstance may we be indebted for this happy, smiling face of yours, this morning?" (Our friend K—— had been, unfortunately, of a very desponding and somewhat of a choleric turn of mind, previously.)

"Really, is the change so perceptible, then? Well, my dear sir, you shall have the secret: for, happy as I appear—and be assured, my appearances are by no means deceptive, for I never felt more happy in my life—it will still give me pleasure to inform you, and won't take long, either. It is simply this; I have made a whole family happy!"

"Indeed! Why, you have discovered a truly valuable recipe for blues, then, which may be used *ad libitum*, eh, K——?"

"You may well say that. But, really, my friend, I feel no little mortification at net making so simple and valuable a discovery at an earlier period of my life. Heaven knows," continued K——, "I have looked for contentment everywhere else. First, I sought for *wealth* in the gold mines of California, thinking that was the true source of all earthly joys; but after obtaining it, I found myself with such a multiplicity of cares and anxieties, that I was really more unhappy than ever. I then sought for pleasure in travelling. This answered somewhat the purpose of dissipating cares, etc., so long as it lasted; but, dear me, it gave no permanent satisfaction. After seeing the whole world, I was as badly off as Alexander the Great. He cried for another world to *conquer*, and I cried for another world to *see*."

The case of our friend, I imagine, differs not materially from that of a host of other seekers of contentment in this productive world. Like "blind leaders of the blind," our invariable fate is to go astray in the universal race for happiness. How common is it, after seeking for it in every place but the right one, for the selfish man to lay the whole blame upon this fine world—as if any body was to blame but himself. Even some professors of religion are too apt to libel the world. "Well, this is a troublesome world, to make the best of it," is not an uncommon expression; neither is it a truthful one. "Troubles, disappointments, losses, crosses, sickness, and death, make up the sum and substance of our existence here," add they, with tremendous emphasis, as if they had no hand in producing the sad catalogue. The trouble is, we set too high a value on our own merits; we imagine ourselves deserving of great favors and privileges, while we are doing nothing to merit them. In this respect, we are not altogether unlike the young man in the parable, who, by-the-bye, was also a professor—he professed very loudly of having done all those good things "from his youth up." But when the command came, "go sell all thou hast, and give to the poor," &c., he soon took the conceit out of him.

In this connection, there are two or three seemingly important considerations, which I feel some delicacy in touching upon here. However,

in the kindest possible spirit, I would merely remark that there is a very large amount of wealth in the Church—by this I include its wealthy members, of course; and refer to no particular denomination; by Church, I mean all Christian denominations. Now, in connection with this fact, such a question as this arises in my mind—and I put it, not for the purpose of fault-finding, for I don't know that I have a right view of the matter, but merely for the consideration of those who are fond of hoarding up their earthly gains, viz.: Suppose the modern Church was composed of such professors as the self-denying disciples of our Saviour,—with their piety, simplicity, and this wealth; what think you, would be the consequence? Now I do not intend to throw out any such flings, as “Comparisons are odious”—“This is the modern Christian age”—“The age of Christian privileges,” and all that sort of nonsense. Still, I am rather inclined to the opinion that if we were all—in and out of the Church—disposed to live up to, or carry out what we professedly know to be right, it would be almost as difficult to find real trouble, as it is now to find real happiness.

The sources of contentment, and discontentment, are discoverable, therefore, without going into a metaphysical examination of the subject. Just in proportion as we happen to discharge, or neglect known duties, are we, according to my view, happy or miserable on earth.

Philosophy tells us that our happiness and well-being depends upon a conformity to certain unalterable laws—moral, physical, and organic—which act upon the intellectual, moral, and material universe, of which man is a part, and which determine, or regulate the growth, happiness, and well-being of all organic beings. These views, when reduced to their simple meaning, amount to the same thing, call it by what name we will. Duties of course, imply legal or moral obligations, which we are certainly, legally or morally bound to pay, perform, or discharge. And certain it is, there is no getting over them—they are as irresistible as Divine power, as universal as Divine presence, as permanent as Divine existence, and no art, nor cunning of man can disconnect unhappiness from transgressing them. How necessary to our happiness, then, is it, not only to know, but to perform our whole duty!

One of the great duties of man in this life, and, perhaps, the most neglected, is that of doing good, or benefiting one another. That doing good is clearly a duty devolving upon man, there can be no question. The benevolent Creator in placing man in the world, endowed him with mental and physical energies, which clearly denote that he is to be active in his day and generation. Active in what? Certainly not in mischief, for that would not be consistent with Divine Goodness. Neither should we suppose that we are here for our own sakes simply. Such an idea would be presumptuous. For what purpose, then, was man endowed with all these facilities of mind and body, but to do good and glorify his Maker? True philosophy teaches that benevolence was not only the design of the Creator in all His works, but the fruits to be expected from

them. The whole infinite contrivances of everything above, around and within us, are directed to certain benevolent issues, and all the laws of nature are in perfect harmony with this idea. That such is the design of man may also be inferred from the happiness which attends every good action, and the misery of discontentment which attends those who, not only do wrong, but are useless to themselves and to society. Friend K——'s case, above quoted, is a fair illustration of this truth.

Now, then, if it is our duty to do all the good we can, and I think this will be admitted, particularly by the Christian, and this be measured by our means, and opportunity, then there are many whom Providence has blessed with the means, and opportunity, of doing a very great amount of good. And if it be true, as it manifestly is, that “it is more blessed to give than receive,” then has Providence also blessed them with very great privileges. The privilege of giving liberally, and thus obtaining for themselves the greater blessing, which is the result of every benevolent action, the simple satisfaction with ourselves which follows a good act, or consciousness of having done our duty in relieving a fellow-creature, are blessings indeed, which none but the good or benevolent can realize. Such kind spirits are never cast down. Their hearts always light and cheerful—rendered so by their many kind offices,—they can always enjoy their neighbors, rich or poor, high or low, and love them too; and with a flow of spirits which bespeak a heart all right within, they make all glad and happy around them.

Doing good is an infallible antidote for melancholy. When the heart seems heavy, and our minds can light upon nothing but little naughty perplexities, everything going wrong, no bright spot or relief anywhere for our crazy thoughts, and we are finally wound up in a web of melancholy, depend upon it there is nothing, nothing which can dispel this angry, ponderous and unnatural cloud from our *rheumatic minds and consciences* like a charity visit—to give liberally to those in need of succor, the poor widow, the suffering, sick, and poor, the aged invalid, the lame, the blind, &c., &c.: all have a claim upon your bounty, and how they will bless you and love you for it—anyhow, they will thank kind Providence for your mission of love. He that makes one such visit will make another and another; he can't very well get weary in such well doing, for his is the greater blessing. It is a blessing indeed: how the heart is lightened, the soul enlarged, the mind improved, and even health; for the mind being liberated from perplexities, the body is at rest, the nerves in repose, and the blood, equalized, courses freely through the system, giving strength, vigor, and equilibrium to the whole complicated machinery. Thus we can think clearer, love better, enjoy life, and be thankful for it.

What a beautiful arrangement it is that we can, by doing good to others, do so much good to ourselves! The wealthy classes, who “rise above society like clouds above the earth, to diffuse an abundant dew,” should not forget this fact. The season has now about arrived, when the good

people of all classes will be most busily engaged in these delightful duties. The experiment is certainly worth trying by all. If all those desponding individuals, whose chief comfort is to growl at this "troublesome world," will but take the hint, look trouble full in the face and relieve it, they will, like friend K——, feel much better.

It may be set down as a generally correct axiom, (with some few exceptions, perhaps, such as accidents, and the deceptions and cruelties of those whom we injudiciously select for friends and confidants, from our want of discernment,) that life is much what we make it, and so is the world.

---